



Bangladesh's Human Rights Crisis

Voices Silenced, Freedoms Crushed, Fear Everywhere





Protests have been held in parts of Hindu-majority India to denounce attacks on Hindus in neighboring Bangladesh

Image: Goutam Hore/DW

Bangladesh in 2025 is no longer a democracy; it is a nation held hostage by fear, violence, and betrayal. Under the shadow of Muhammad Yunus's illegitimate interim regime, the promise of freedom has withered into a nightmare of persecution. Human rights are not just violated, they are dismantled. Journalists are hunted like criminals, activists are branded as enemies of the state, and ordinary citizens live in terror of mobs that now dictate justice.

Are human rights eroding under Muhammad Yunus?

The very institutions meant to protect the people have collapsed. The courts bend to mob pressure, the police act as enforcers of political vendettas, and the army stands silent, watching the country descend into chaos while refusing to intervene. The rule of fear has replaced the rule of law, and the price of dissent is no longer just prison; it is disappearance, torture, or death.



This is not governance; it is oppression. This is not democracy; it is tyranny draped in the false legitimacy of international applause. And in today's Bangladesh, to speak the truth is to risk everything, because the truth itself has become a crime.

Human rights violations in Bangladesh during the interim government's tenure

Silencing Dissent: Criminalizing Free Thought

In Bangladesh, telling the truth has become a courageous and dangerous act. Harassment, arbitrary arrests, and enforced disappearances of journalists, writers, and human rights activists have reached unprecedented levels. Between August 2024 and July 2025, 496 journalists were subjected to harassment, while three lost their lives in the line of duty. Scores of media workers face constant threats, court summons, and intimidation, creating a climate where speaking out is a perilous choice.



496 journalists faced harassment in one year

Following August 5, 2024, the repression took a darker turn. Journalists and writers were dragged into courts on trumped-up murder and assault charges, linked to incidents in which they had no involvement. Across Dhaka, Sylhet, Chattogram, and dozens of other districts, journalists, both seasoned and local correspondents, were implicated in fabricated cases, many tied to past political unrest. The sheer scale of these prosecutions, often citing flimsy or contradictory “witness testimonies,” underscores an organized effort to criminalize free thought and intimidate the press.



The suppression extends far beyond the courts. Press accreditation cards were revoked for hundreds of journalists, while news offices were stormed by mobs aiming to instill fear. Editors and news chiefs were dismissed, and at least 150 media professionals lost their livelihoods, leaving entire communities of journalists vulnerable and silenced. Even routine access to government information was blocked, with the interim administration showing blatant indifference toward reforms to the Right to Information Act, undermining the public’s fundamental right to know.

Janakantha allegedly taken over, case filed against owners

Adding to this, social media and artificial intelligence have become instruments of manipulation and propaganda. False news, doctored images, and rumors are systematically spread to discredit journalists and activists. AI-generated content is increasingly used to fabricate events, stoke divisions, and tarnish reputations, while the government turns a blind eye.



Throughout all this, the army remains conspicuously absent, refusing to intervene even as mobs, radical elements, and political operatives threaten journalists with impunity. Freedom of expression is no longer a right in Bangladesh; it has been criminalized, weaponized, and silenced. Every false charge, every raid, every dismissal reinforces a terrifying truth: dissent is dangerous, truth is perilous, and fear governs public life.



Bangladesh is fast descending into a society where silence is survival, and the very act of speaking becomes an act of defiance, punished with harassment, imprisonment, or worse.



Courts Hijacked: Justice in the Grip of Mobs

In Bangladesh, justice no longer serves the law, it serves power and fear. The courts, meant to uphold the rights of citizens, have become instruments of intimidation, manipulation, and arbitrary punishment. Since August 2024, the judicial system has been systematically weaponized against ordinary citizens, journalists, political activists, and anyone daring to question the authorities.

Across multiple districts, journalists and writers have been dragged into court on fabricated charges, ranging from murder to assault, often for events they had no connection to. Scores face indefinite legal limbo, as cases are filed en masse, citing flimsy or contradictory evidence. Witness testimonies are recycled, manipulated, or outright fabricated to target dissenters. Entire media communities live under the constant shadow of prosecution, where even reporting on unrest can result in criminal charges.

266 journalists face criminal cases so far

The situation is no better for ordinary citizens. In towns like Gopalganj, arbitrary arrests and detentions have terrorized residents. Children as young as 12 have been jailed under anti-terrorism laws for crimes they did not commit. Families report being forced to pay bribes or comply with police demands under threats of arrest. Even those with no political affiliation, shopkeepers, students, and local professionals, have been swept into legal proceedings simply for being present during public gatherings or demonstrations. The law has been turned into a weapon of mass intimidation, rather than a shield of protection.



Meanwhile, mobs and radical groups roam freely, knowing the courts will not hold them accountable. Inflammatory rhetoric and violent acts are rarely prosecuted; instead, victims of attacks are pressured, harassed, and blamed. Courts have failed to act impartially, leaving citizens at the mercy of political actors and vigilantes. This selective justice erodes trust in institutions, creating a climate where power, not law, dictates outcomes.





Even when the judiciary attempts to act, interference and intimidation are rampant. Lawyers, witnesses, and judges themselves are subject to threats, ensuring that verdicts favor those with influence or force. Innocent families, already traumatized by violence or loss, are coerced into hurried burials without proper autopsies, while legal procedures are manipulated to shield perpetrators. The message is clear: in Bangladesh, accountability is for the powerful, and impunity is guaranteed for those aligned with the regime or its allies.



With the army standing idle, refusing to enforce basic law and order, citizens are left unprotected, courts complicit in injustice, and mobs emboldened by the absence of accountability. The legal system has been hijacked, and fear has become the currency of survival.

Justice, once a promise, has been reduced to a theatre of intimidation, a grim performance where the victims are silenced, and the guilty roam free. Bangladesh's courts now serve as enforcers of terror, not protectors of rights, leaving the population in a perpetual state of vulnerability and fear.

Our country today stands as a nation where violence dictates politics and mobs define justice. Instead of safeguarding the civil rights of its citizens, the state has allowed armed groups, political mobs, and vigilantes to take control of the streets, silencing opposition voices and instilling fear in ordinary people.

Since the fall of the Awami League government on August 5, 2024, political violence has spiraled out of control. Opposition groups and extremist factions, emboldened by the absence of law enforcement action, have unleashed an unchecked campaign of intimidation, vandalism, and assault. Reports of homes and businesses being torched, political opponents being hunted, and neighborhoods being raided under the guise of "retaliation" flood the country. These are not isolated incidents; they are part of a wider, systematic assault on the fundamental rights of citizens to speak, associate, and live without fear.



Peaceful demonstrations have not been spared either. Protesters demanding justice or accountability are routinely met with brutality, whether from armed mobs or from politically loyal police units. Tear gas, rubber bullets, and batons are deployed against unarmed crowds, while organized mobs target demonstrators with impunity. What should have been moments of democratic expression instead became bloodstained scenes of terror, where lives are lost and voices are permanently silenced.



The civil rights violations are staggering. Citizens face intimidation for exercising the basic right to free assembly. Those attempting to document or report on political violence risk harassment, detention, or disappearance. Minority communities, often scapegoated during waves of unrest, have been particularly vulnerable, with temples, shrines, and cultural landmarks attacked while authorities look away.

Perhaps most damning is the silence of the army and the inaction of the interim government. Despite the escalating violence, the institutions tasked with protecting the people remain idle, choosing neutrality in the face of bloodshed. This deliberate refusal to intervene has only emboldened the perpetrators, signaling that mob violence is the new law of the land.

The result is a country where fear has replaced freedom. Every citizen knows that political affiliation, religious identity, or even a single social media post can make them a target. The promise of democracy has been hijacked by violence, leaving Bangladeshis to wonder: Who will protect their rights when the state itself refuses to act?

Rise of Islamic Radicalism: Women Under Siege

What was once cloaked under the guise of “faith” has now exploded into a ruthless campaign against women, an assault that goes far beyond rhetoric and into the realm of daily terror. Radical Islamist groups, emboldened by weak governance and mob rule, have weaponized religion to strip women of their dignity, freedom, and security. The result is a society where women live under siege, cornered by both physical violence and systemic intimidation.

Bangladeshi Women’s Rights Opposed by Hardline Religious Groups

Reports from across the country reveal a disturbing pattern: women are targeted not just for their political affiliations or professions, but simply for existing outside the narrow, suffocating standards dictated by extremist ideology. Female students and professionals have been attacked for their clothing choices, harassed for speaking their minds, and beaten for challenging radical narratives. Even ordinary women on the streets are not spared; harassment, assault, and threats have become routine, creating an atmosphere where survival means silence.



The rise of mob justice has amplified these horrors. Radical groups openly enforce their version of “moral policing,” with mobs shaming and attacking women in marketplaces, universities, and even in their own neighborhoods. Victims are branded as “immoral” or “anti-Islamic,” while their attackers face no consequences. In many cases, local authorities turn a blind eye, or worse, stand alongside the perpetrators. Instead of defending citizens, law enforcement has too often chosen complicity, offering protection to the aggressors while silencing the victims.



The Rise of Moral Policing and Violence Against Women in Bangladesh

The judiciary, already compromised by political and mob influence, has failed women entirely. Survivors of sexual assault are left to navigate a system designed to humiliate them further, where lodging a complaint can mean more harassment, more threats, and little hope of justice. In some cases, women have even been pressured into withdrawing complaints under threats of public shaming or violence against their families.



This toxic mix of radicalism, mob rule, and state indifference has forced women out of public spaces and eroded decades of progress in gender equality. Universities, once a ground for women's empowerment, are turning into arenas of fear where female students are silenced, threatened, and attacked for daring to pursue education. Professional women, journalists, doctors, teachers, are increasingly withdrawing from public life, not because they lack the will, but because the cost of resistance has become unbearably high.

And yet, the silence of those in power is deafening. By refusing to crack down on radical groups and by neglecting to protect women, the state has effectively endorsed this wave of violence. The failure to confront radicalism has created a chilling reality: women are no longer safe in their own country, trapped in a system that denies them freedom while emboldening those who seek to erase their presence from public life.

Women in Bangladesh are not merely under pressure; they are under siege. The radical forces waging war on their rights are not fringe elements anymore, they are becoming the architects of everyday fear. And with each act of violence left unpunished, the message is clear: women's lives and liberties are expendable.



Mob Violence and Targeted Minority Attacks

Mobs have become the new enforcers of fear, and ethnic and religious minorities are their easiest prey. Entire communities are being terrorized under the nose of the so-called authorities, with little to no intervention from law enforcement or the army. When mobs descend, the state retreats, leaving vulnerable groups at the mercy of orchestrated violence.

258 communal attacks in Bangladesh in the first half of 2025

In Rangpur, Hindu families watched helplessly as their homes were set ablaze, looted, and demolished by frenzied attackers. The assaults were not isolated incidents but part of a pattern of targeted intimidation, a clear message that minorities have no guaranteed place of safety in the country. Victims who dared to resist were beaten, while others fled, forced into displacement within their own homeland.



Two Hindu men lynched by mob in Rangpur

The violence did not stop at home. Shrines and temples, symbols of spiritual refuge, were vandalized, desecrated, and left in ruins. Devotees were chased away, while centuries-old heritage was reduced to rubble. Even cultural landmarks were not spared. Statues of Begum Rokeya, a pioneer of women's education, and memorials dedicated to the Liberation War, once sacred reminders of sacrifice and identity, were smashed to pieces. This was not blind rage; it was deliberate cultural erasure.





Bangladesh witnesses' wave of violent attacks against monuments of liberation war

What makes these attacks even more chilling is the silence of those tasked with protecting citizens. Police units stood idle, and the army, despite being deployed in various regions, made no serious effort to stop the destruction. This deliberate indifference makes the state complicit in the crimes, granting mobs a free hand to persecute minorities and erase the nation's historical memory.



These waves of destruction are not mere law-and-order breakdowns, they are calculated assaults on the very idea of pluralism and justice. By abandoning minorities to mob rule, the interim government has effectively sanctioned a campaign of terror that shreds the country's moral fabric.

International Intervention: A Path to Justice and Protection

With freedoms crushed, voices silenced, and fear omnipresent, Bangladeshis are looking outward for protection and accountability. The interim government's indifference, the army's silence, and the unchecked violence of mobs and extremists have left citizens with little hope that domestic institutions can restore law, order, and human rights. In this climate, international attention and intervention are no longer optional, they are urgent.

Human rights organizations around the world, from the United Nations to Amnesty International, have repeatedly highlighted the worsening situation in Bangladesh. Yet, without concrete action, these warnings remain words on paper. Targeted foreign intervention could take multiple forms: diplomatic pressure to ensure government accountability, sanctions on officials responsible for rights violations, and international monitoring missions to protect civilians and minorities.

Bangladeshis are watching the global community, hoping that pressure from foreign governments, human rights bodies, and international media can break the cycle of impunity. They look to mechanisms like the UN Human Rights Council, international courts, and multilateral organizations to demand justice for the harassed journalists, women under siege, and minority communities living in constant terror.

Moreover, international attention can empower local civil society and human rights defenders, providing them the resources and protection to continue their work without fear of reprisals. This is particularly crucial for women's rights activists, journalists, and minority groups, whose struggles are often invisible to the world yet central to Bangladesh's future.

Without foreign intervention, citizens face a grim reality: the continued erosion of rights, unchecked radicalism, and the normalization of violence. The eyes of the world are now the last hope for Bangladeshis seeking safety, justice, and a restoration of their fundamental freedoms.